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AUTHOR Miller, Shirley Matile
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ABSTRACT

This study examined the relationship of dependency, empathy, and altruism. It was hypothesized that: (1) dependency would be related in a curvilinear manner to empathy, with children who are moderate in dependency scoring highest in empathy; (2) dependency would be positively related to visible altruism when such prosocial behavior results in approval or affection from another; (3) when an altruistic act is anonymous, those individuals who are moderate in dependency would behave in the most prosocial manner; (4) empathy would be positively related to altruism when level of dependency is controlled in situations where dependency may be a factor; and (5) in situations where dependency is not a crucial motivating factor, those individuals highest in empathy would be most altruistic. Thirty-six fourth-grade students were measured on three measures of dependency and one measure of empathy, and sharing behavior was observed in two experimental situations. Each child was given the opportunity to share eight nickel items in two conditions: (1) in the experimenter's presence (visible altruism), and (2) anonymously (invisible altruism). Results indicated inconsistent support for the hypotheses, but suggest complex relationships among dependency, empathy, and altruism. Sex differences were found. Nine pages of tables and graphs are included. (Author/SB)

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Dependency, Empathy, and Altruism

Shirley Matile Miller

University of Michigan

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Dependency, Empathy, and Altruism

Dependency, empathy, and altruism are social concepts. By definition, the individual who is emotionally or instrumentally dependent is dependent on other people. Similarly, the individual who is empathic is empathic towards other people, and the individual who is altruistic is altruistic towards other people. In this presentation I will discuss hypothesized interrelationships among these three constructs as well as the results of preliminary testing of these hypotheses.

The Theoretical Model

Dependency and Empathy

The child who is dependent emotionally upon a significant other is desirous of eliciting certain reactions from that other towards himself. Because of the salience of the reactions of the other to the dependent individual, he is constantly motivated to understand what the other person is feeling and thinking since such matters could be highly relevant to his own needs. In short, the emotionally dependent person is motivated to be empathic towards those whose regard is important to him. The individual with low dependency needs may care less about what others think and feel regarding himself so may have less reason to be empathic.

This analysis may hold true for moderate dependency needs, but it is doubtful if the person with extremely high dependency needs is empathic towards others. Rather, the intensity of his own needs may preclude the highly dependent individual's being aware of the needs of others.

The model being proposed, then, is a curvilinear relationship between dependency and empathy. Those individuals who have low dependency needs

may tend to be less empathic towards others simply because others are not that necessary or important to them. Individuals with very high dependency needs are also less empathic towards others because the salience of their own needs precludes sensitivity towards others. Only the individual with moderate dependency needs will have maximum empathy towards others since this is functional to his need gratification, and his capacity is not limited by the intensity of his needs.

Dependency and Altruism

Empathy has been hypothesized as being one possible motivating factor for altruism (Hoffman, 1975). If this is the case, then the above model would predict that, with other factors equated, those individuals who are moderate in dependency would be highest in altruism since they are hypothesized to be highest in empathy.

However, in instances where an altruistic act might satisfy a dependency need, dependency would be expected to relate directly to altruism. For example, if a teacher asks each child to donate money to a fund for poor children, those children to whom the teacher's approval is most important logically could be expected to donate the most money. Such cases could be labeled visible altruism as opposed to invisible altruism when the altruistic act would remain completely anonymous.

In other words, dependency should relate positively and in a linear manner to visible altruism when these prosocial acts would result in approval or affection from another. However, in the invisible altruism situation dependency is not a directly relevant motivation but is mediated by empathy. Hence dependency would be expected to relate in a curvilinear manner to invisible altruism with those individuals who are moderate in dependency being most altruistic.

Empathy and Altruism

Empathy is expected to relate positively to invisible altruism. After partialling out the effects of dependency, empathy would also be expected to correlate positively to visible altruism.

Summary of Hypotheses

In short, the model described here yields the following predictions: (a) Dependency is related in a curvilinear manner to empathy, with those who are moderate in dependency scoring highest in empathy. (b) Dependency is positively related to visible altruism when that prosocial behavior results in approval or affection from another. (c) When an altruistic act is anonymous, those individuals who are moderate in dependency behave in the most prosocial manner. (d) Empathy is positively related to altruism when level of dependency is controlled in situations where dependency may be a factor. (e) In situations where dependency is not a crucial motivating factor, it is predicted that those individuals who are highest in empathy will be most altruistic.

Method

Subjects

The subjects were sixty-six predominantly white fourth-grade children from two elementary schools in Ann Arbor, Michigan. Twenty-seven of the children were girls, and thirty-nine were boys. At the time they were tested, forty-six of the children were nine years of age, and twenty of the children were ten years of age. The socioeconomic class of the families of the children was primarily middle class.

Measures

Three measures of dependency were included in the study, the Children's Social Desirability Questionnaire (Crandall, Crandall, and

Katkovsky, 1965), a sociometric measure, and a teacher rating scale. The Children's Social Desirability Questionnaire, designed to measure need for approval, was administered individually with a direct question format. Past research with this measure (Crandall, 1966) has indicated that it may assess only those individuals with high need for approval and specific expectancies--namely of rejection.

Four different behavioral descriptions, designed to measure four different types of dependency, were included in the sociometric measure which was also administered to each child individually. Peer Rating One (high dependency with fears of rejection): "This person is very quiet in class. He or she often stands and watches other children play instead of joining in. Often this person likes to stand close to the teacher." Peer Rating Two (High dependency as evidenced by negative attention seeking behaviors): "This person often talks a lot in a loud voice and wants others to watch him or her do things. Sometimes this person does things just for attention." Peer Rating Three (moderate dependency): "This person likes to play with others and often asks them to come play with him or her. Also, this person likes to do things for the teacher." Peer Rating Four (low dependency): "This person likes to play by himself a lot and does not ask for help in doing very hard things. This person often has hobbies that he or she is very interested in."

Similarly, items of the teacher rating scale (modeled after Coopersmith's rating scale) were categorized according to their expected relationship with these four types of dependency. However, because of a lack of high intercorrelations among the items composing several of the groupings, the items were analyzed separately rather than grouped.

A modification of the Feshbach and Roe Affective Situation Test for Empathy (Feshbach and Roe, 1968) was used to measure empathy. This measure consists of eight slide sequences--two for each of the four emotions of happiness, sadness, fear and anger--with short verbal stories.

Altruism was measured by the child's sharing behavior in two different situations. Each child was given the opportunity to share eight nickel items in the following two conditions: (a) in the experimenter's presence (visible altruism), and (b) anonymously (invisible altruism).

Procedure

Each child was seen individually by the experimenter on two different occasions during school time. Each of the two sessions lasted approximately a half-hour. During the first session the empathy task was administered followed by an altruism measure. The second session consisted of the administration of the Children's Social Desirability Questionnaire followed by the sociometric behavioral assessment and then finally the last altruism measure.

Results and Discussion

Tables 1 through 6 as well as the two figures give the results of the data analyses. Because of the time allocated for this presentation, I can only briefly summarize them here.

Significant sex differences were found on several of the dependency measures. Though boys and girls did not differ significantly on the empathic or altruism measures, the relationships among these variables were quite different for each sex. This illustrates that just because no significant sex differences are found on a measure, it is presumptuous to assume that the underlying motivations resulting in these scores are the same for boys and girls.

For girls some support was found for a positive relationship between empathy and sharing in both of the altruism conditions. Also, as predicted, moderate dependency, as measured by peer and teacher rating items, was related to invisible altruism. However, empathy may not be the mediating variable between moderate dependency and invisible altruism because none of the dependency measures was related to empathy for girls.

The correlations found among the variables were quite different for boys. No evidence was found for a positive relationship between empathy and altruism; in fact empathy was negatively correlated to invisible altruism. The Children's Social Desirability Questionnaire, a measure of need for approval, was also negatively correlated to invisible altruism for boys. Furthermore, a positive correlation between social desirability and a difference in donations in the visible and invisible altruism conditions indicated that for boys need for approval may have been a relevant motivation in the visible altruism condition. Empathy was positively correlated to social desirability for boys.

Curvilinear regressions were also performed. For boys, the curvilinear analyses were significant relating social desirability and empathy and social desirability and invisible altruism. As can be seen from the figures, at the upper end of the social desirability scores the positive trend between social desirability and empathy for boys tended to be reversed, and at the lower end of the social desirability scores the negative relationship between social desirability and invisible altruism tended to be reversed.

In conclusion, inconsistent support was found for the original hypotheses of the study. However, the correlates that were found among the variables are interesting and suggestive of possible complex relationships among dependency, empathy, and altruism.

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Table 1

Sex Differences on the Dependency, Empathy and Altruism Measures

Measure	Mean for Girls	Mean for Boys	t
Social Desirability	20.26	15.95	1.97**
Peer Rating 1	19.91	13.19	3.52***
Peer Rating 2	11.13	18.41	-4.12***
Peer Rating 3	18.72	14.08	2.43**
Peer Rating 4	14.06	17.44	-1.66
Empathy	6.41	6.11	.96
Visible Altruism	1.52	1.26	.88
Invisible Altruism	.59	.57	.07
Total Altruism	2.11	1.84	.46
Difference in Altruism	.93	.70	.65

*$p < .10$
**$p < .05$
***$p < .01$

Table 2

Teacher Rating Scale: Significant Sex Differences

Item	Direction of Difference	Attained Significance
Does this child frequently pout and whine when upset?	Boys > Girls	.06
When this child is scolded or criticized, does he become very aggressive?	Boys > Girls	.02
Does this child publicly brag or boast about his exploits?	Boys > Girls	.06
Does this child attempt to bully or dominate other children?	Boys > Girls	.07
Does this child seek attention by speaking out of turn?	Boys > Girls	.01
Does this child seek attention by making unnecessary noises?	Boys > Girls	.01
Does this child cooperate in class?	Boys < Girls	.01
Does this child become involved in some interest or hobby of his own, preferring to play by himself?	Boys > Girls	.06
Does this child strive to please the teacher?	Boys < Girls	.01

Table 3

Correlations between Empathy and the Dependency Measures

Sex	Children's Social Desirability Scale	Peer Rating 1	Peer Rating 2	Peer Rating 3	Peer Rating 4
Girls	.12	.21	-.11	.26	.29
Boys	.39**	.13	-.20	-.01	-.08

**$p < .05$

Table 4

Correlations between Dependency and Altruism Measures

	Visible Altruism		Invisible Altruism		Total Altruism		Difference in Altruism	
	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys
Children's Social Desirability Scale	-.16	.02	-.05	-.39**	-.12	-.26	-.11	.43***
Peer Rating 1	.11	-.37**	.28	-.16	.23	-.29*	-.20	-.11
Peer Rating 2	-.05	.10	-.15	.21	-.12	.20	.13	-.13
Peer Rating 3	.09	.14	.41**	.08	.29	.12	-.37*	.01
Peer Rating 4	.16	.19	.23	.21	.22	.24	-.10	-.08

*$p<.10$
**$p<.05$
***$p<.01$

Table 5

Teacher Rating Items Correlated with the Altruism Measures[a]

Item	Visible Altruism		Invisible Altruism		Total Altruism		Difference in Altruism	
	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys
Does this child ask for help when attempting a hard task?	-.27	-.01	-.34*	.09	-.35*	.05	.12	-.11
Is this child very shy with his classmates?	-.35*	-.17	-.26	-.14	-.34*	-.18	-.05	.02
Does this child frequently pout and whine when upset?	-.52***	.16	-.59***	.36**	-.63***	.34**	.15	-.25
Do other children choose this child for activities?	.33*	.17	.48***	.12	.46**	.17	-.21	.01
When this child is scolded or criticized, does he become very aggressive?	-.44**	.16	-.46**	.22	-.51***	.24	.08	-.10
Does this child show confidence and assurance in his actions toward his teachers?	.26	.24	.40**	.15	.38**	.22	-.19	.02
Does this child show confidence and assurance in his actions toward his classmates?	.17	.30*	.40**	.28*	.33*	.33**	-.29	-.07
Does this child attempt to dominate or bully other children?	-.36*	.30*	-.31	.27	-.38*	.35**	-.01	-.04
Does this child seek attention by speaking out of turn?	-.36*	.01	-.54***	.16	-.52***	.12	.25	-.15

Table 5 continued

	Visible Altruism		Invisible Altruism		Total Altruism		Difference in Altruism	
	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys
Does this child seek attention by making unnecessary noises?	-.14	-.09	-.39**	.02	-.31	-.02	.30	-.08
Does this child cooperate in class?	.31	-.03	.48***	-.27	.46**	-.20	-.24	.26
Does this child strive to please the teacher?	.32	.00	.43**	-.25	.42**	-.17	-.17	.26

[a]Out of the twenty-two teacher rating items, ten of the items were not significantly correlated with any of the altruism variables

*$p<.10$
**$p<.05$
***$p<.01$

Table 6

Correlations between Empathy and the Altruism Measures

Sex	Visible Altruism	Invisible Altruism	Total Altruism	Difference in Altruism
Girls	.35*	.32	.38**	-.02
Boys	.02	-.30*	-.19	.34**

*$p < .10$
**$p < .05$

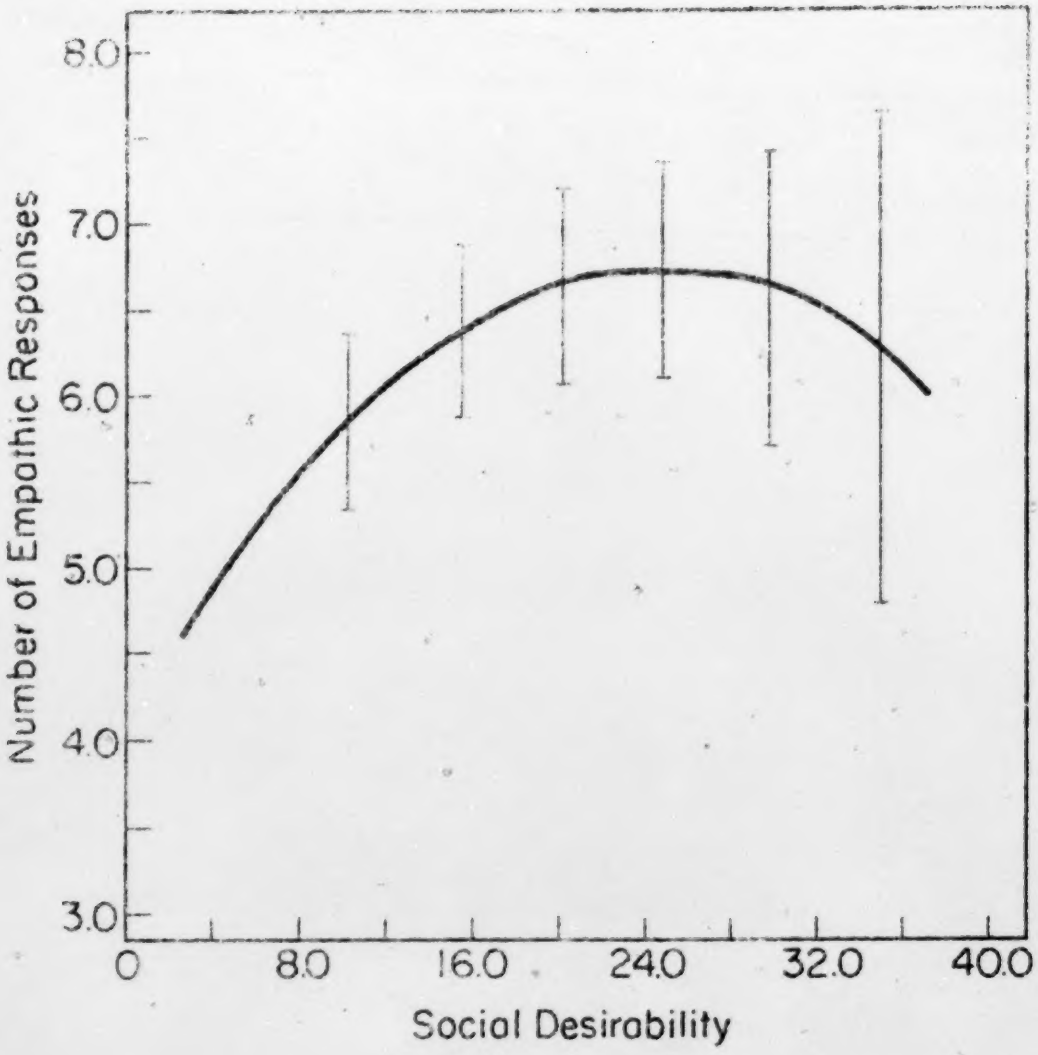

Figure 1 Predicted curve for boys only from curvilinear regression of number of empathic responses against social desirability and .90 confidence intervals for number of empathic responses at specific levels of social desirability.

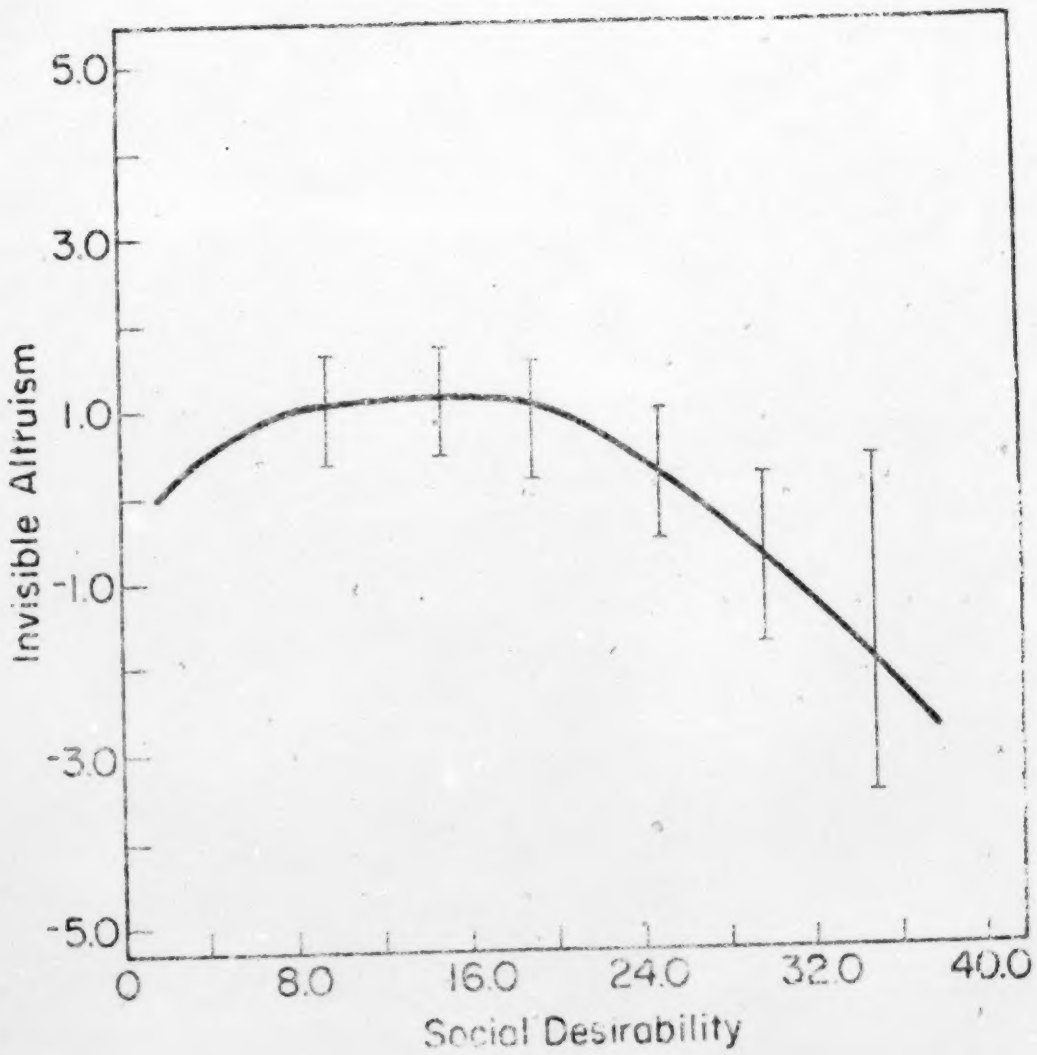

Figure 2: Predicted curve for boys only from curvilinear regression of invisible altruism against social desirability and .90 confidence intervals for invisible altruism at specific levels of social desirability.